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ABSTRACT

Underlying this essay on psycholinguistic theory is the belief that language teachers often suffer from neurotic symptoms of confusion, anxiety, and uncertainty in connection with their work. The author discusses his "BALT" theory (battered language teachers). Philosophically-oriented remarks are directed toward teachers wishing to redirect their educational philosophy and teach through a heightening and expansion of their own personal consciousness. A direct analogy between Charles A. Reich's "The Greening of America" and Jakobovits' ideas concerning 'consciousness' and 'freedom' is evident throughout this paper. It is the author's hope that a widespread conversion among language teachers of the 'old school,' based on the premises of freedom in psycholinguistic and pedagogical areas, rather than on intellectual servitude, will be forthcoming. (RL)

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On Becoming a Language Teacher

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Today, many FL teachers suffer from a dis-ease of the spirit that I would like to refer to as the BALT syndrome (for: the "Battered Language Teacher" syndrome). This is a neurosis that is characterized by the chronic and constant alternation between two irrational states of the mind: from self-elevation to instructional omnipotence and omniscience all the way down to self-denigration to infantile helplessness. The belief in instructional omnipotence and omniscience is founded on the implausible hypothesis that it is possible to teach a second language--in the strong sense of 'teach' -- in the classrooms of our mass educational system, in spite of convincing evidence to the contrary. Infantile helplessness is symptomatized by an exaggerated dependence on methodological strategies that, like number painting and do-it-yourself kits, leave nothing but trivialities to be decided upon. The recent emphasis in education on accountability and the related requirement to develop behavioral objectives has so aggravated the balt syndrome that language teachers are suffering from neurotic symptoms of confusion, anxiety and uncertainty in connection with their work. What I'd like to do is to attempt to analyze the balt syndrome, to expose the fallacies that underlie it, and thereby, hopefully, to ease the language teacher's burden by providing him with rationalizations that might serve, for some of them, to bring about a conversion to a new consciousness, a new reality about their teaching, one that is based on the premises of freedom rather than intellectual servitude.[2]

Our Current Educational Slogans in the Light of a New Consciousness and their Consequences

According to the author of The Greening of America (Reich, 1971), two elements are necessary to bring about a change in consciousness, from II, the servile consciousness of the Corporate State, to III, the new con-

sciousness of freedom, of the self. These two elements are the realization of betrayal and the positive affirmation of an alternative, the denial of the inevitability of the status quo. The battered language teacher who exhibits the classic balt syndrome suffers the pains of the double bind characteristic of the liberal intellectual at the level of consciousness II: he is honest and searching enough to be aware of the great betrayal of our ideal objectives, but his sheepishness makes him buckle under the system, and he robs himself of the imaginative, freedom giving leap into the unknown. He accepts, condones, does not want to rock the boat, feels helpless against the mindless system, hesitates, falters, suffers, remains ineffectual, denigrates his creative potentialities for choice, never recovers his self. Like Reich, I do not believe in the necessity, or even desirability, of violent revolution, civil disobedience, strike action, resignations, or any other of the classic tactics of political and bureaucratic dissent. Radical and effective change in education is possible only through a personal change of consciousness on the part of individual teachers, a reaffirmation at the personal, individual level of the traditional ideals of education for equal opportunity, justice, intellectual growth, individual creativity and the pursuit of life goals based on individual choice. Educational bureaucracy, like the Corporate State of which it is a product, has developed such mindless inertia, that mere humans cannot radically alter its course. There are no all powerful educator-villains to shoot or to axe. Nobody knows how to do it better, even if all of us are dedicated. There is only the possibility of individual choice, in one's limited setting, in the little classrooms of Miss Jones and Mr. Hendrix. If enough such individual choices are exercised, in a significant number of classrooms, the educational bureaucracy will turn into an irrelevant super-structure that ultimately will collapse because nobody will care. The educational process will be saved, the teachers, and the students.

What do I mean by the exercise of individual choice in the context of a change of consciousness? To a large extent, I mean freedom to teach, freedom from the shackles of educational slogans, freedom from the tyranny of irrelevant expertise, freedom to feel the responsibility that goes with professional integrity. The FL teacher (no matter how much this is also true of other teachers) has given up all of these freedoms. His lesson planning sessions are devoted to rehearsing exercises invented by some authority or expert who knows nothing about his individual qualities and those of his students. His classroom and laboratory activities are dictated by the anonymous author of a commercially promoted package of goodies, usually chosen by a FL supervisor who is very conscious of "accountability" and insists on the administration of standardized cooperative tests, neither the teacher nor he understanding the frightfully complex and elusive problems of validity and meaningful comparability across hetereqeneous populations. The "expert" and his research have been elevated to totally unrealistic levels of respect and adoration. Being myself considered by others as an expert on FL teaching, I have been continually embarrassed by the nature of the questions I am asked, questions which presuppose a degree of knowledge and practical know-how in applied matters that is all together out of proportion with reality. Being a prolific writer and talker, I have contributed my share in expert pronouncements, analyses, suggestions and yes, even tests (see Jakobovits, 1970). I accept the responsibility for making them. The educator and teacher must accept the responsibility for taking them. The teacher's instructional activities in the classroom are the responsibility of the teacher, not the supervisor, not the student, not the school system, not the academic expert.

In one sense, the one just discussed, the teacher has given up responsibility which is rightly his. In another sense, he has assumed a responsibility

that isn't realistically his, the responsibility for what the students learn or don't learn. This pernicious form of instructional omnipotence has been thrust upon the teacher by the educational system. It has become part of his consciousness, part of his reality, part of his servitude. It stands in the way of the freedom to teach, it blocks any possibility for free choice, for creative innovation.

It is possible, of course, to provide rationalizations that justify the attribution of responsibility to the teacher for what his students learn, such as, for instance, the rationale of "accountability". Similarly, it is possible to provide rationalizations that free the teacher from that responsibility, such as, for instance, the argument that student motivation, attitude toward school work, sub-cultural background, parental influence, etc., together, far outweigh the variance contribution of the instructional process. Either argument can be pursued rationally, neither would win out over the other. To pursue this matter further is to engage in never ending controversy. It does not change anything. The only solution is a simple one: to simply stop arguing about it by making up one's mind, one way or the other. Those who feel the current betrayal of our ideal educational objectives and, at the same time, can bring themselves to a positive reaffirmation of them, will choose the way of freedom of choice and responsibility for the self, not for the other.

The FL teacher who still waivers can consider the following arguments, as a help in making up his mind. I am going to discuss a few widespread slogans in FL education and point out some of their weaknesses.

1. "We need more research": whenever there is confusion about some problematic aspect of the curriculum, whenever obvious symptoms of failure are perceived, the cry for more research goes up, the cry of frustration and helplessness. At

this level of consciousness, the teacher sees himself at the mercy of others, the expert, the supervisor, the evaluator, the mandarins of teacher training programs. This deference to an all powerful research divinity is entirely misplaced. It stems from a total lack of understanding of the nature of research in the social disciplines. It confuses academic research with the application of its findings to particular, concrete situations. It confuses the application of academic research with applied research. Much of the success of our technology is directly attributable to applied research, and only indirectly to basic research. But we have no counterpart in the social and humanistic spheres to the applied research techniques of engineering.[3] Just because basic research techniques are being focused on educationally relevant issues does not mean that it constitutes applied educational research. An examination of the success of research in solving certain persistent problems in FL teaching would show the futility and gratuitousness of this exercise. Let us look at some of these.

(A) The relationships between age of learner and success in second language learning: there isn't a single piece of research in the known literature that contributes meaningfully to this problem. Nor can there be, given the nature of this problem and the presently available research techniques. To understand this, you must consider the three basic elements involved in the problem: first, the learner and his characteristics, which include not only age but, equally, style of learning and motivational structure both in their surface manifestations (attitudinal responses on questionnaires, observable study habits) and underlying aspects (sub-cultural value structure, need achievement, personality disposition); second, the instructional activities, which includes not merely the easily identifiable elements related to materials and techniques of presentation, but also, equally, the nature of the teacher-student interaction, about which we know very little in specific terms, so-called interactional analysis being but a currently crude attempt to assess some of its features; and

third, the assessment of "success" or the "amount" that is learned, a serious problem that research has not been able to solve, current standardized discrete-point tests being merely crude attempts at approximating certain superficial aspects of communicative competence.

In view of these fundamental difficulties in assessing the basic parameters of the problem of the relationship between age and FL teaching, research cannot contribute any definitive or conclusive answers. At best, it can only be "suggestive". But "suggestiveness" is not a part of research. When we say that "research suggests that..." we are engaging in non-scientific, selective reporting, guided by prior intuitive biases or preferences, for the purpose of persuasion. In connection with the present problem, for instance, we can point to claims made by Wilder Penfield, the Canadian world famous neurophysiologist who had a personal predilection for bilingualism. Penfield claimed that the human brain undergoes a natural, maturational change such that by the age of puberty its ability to acquire languages has greatly decreased. This was not a scientific claim about the specific issue as to the best time to begin the study of a FL. Penfield never engaged in this type of research. He was merely making a highly tentative inference on the basis of his neurophysiological researches, yet his guesses about this became transformed by proponents of FLES programs into the slogan "research shows that..." or "research suggests that..." Persuasive exploitation, ignorance, facile reliance on secondary sources, and sheer time (Penfield's remarks at a graduation ceremony were made twenty years ago), were all recklessly combined and gratuitously transformed into "scientific evidence."

I, too, am personally in favor of the early study of a FL. Experience suggests that children have a remarkable ability to develop communicative competence

in a second language under natural conditions of acquisition. They seem to be able to learn a second language effortlessly (but who knows?) and sound more like native speakers than adults in comparable situations. But is this a result of neurophysiology? Why, then, do we have such little success in teaching black children the effective use of standard English? And to children on Indian reservations? And to the children of Mexican Americans? And Latin Americans? And why have so many FLES programs for middle class white American children been so unsuccessful? We can come up with many hypotheses: sub-cultural background, inadequate facilities, untrained teachers, and so on, but so what? Where does all this leave the neurophysiological claim about the brain's declining plasticity with age? Nowhere. So much idle controversy about what research "shows" or doesn't show.

(B) The relationship between bilingualism and intellectual development: for many years, investigators have attempted to "research" this problem, have contributed several hundred articles, reports, and books on the subject and ended up with the original problem as obscure as it had been before the heavy investment in research effort. Those who believe otherwise no doubt feel that the empirical data that has accumulated on this subject will eventually help us see "the pattern". Faith is a good thing; it is the basis of hope and optimism. But it must not be confused with scientific evidence upon which educational practice is claimed to be based. It is important to understand why the problem we are considering has not been solved by hundreds of experiments. It is not because of "bad research" and the ineptitude of investigators. It is because the currently known research technology in the social disciplines is not of the sort that is suitable for applied research in education. Another five hundred experiments will not solve the basic problems involved in understanding the relationship between bilingualism and intellectual functioning on the one hand, and on the other, how that relationship should guide educational practice in second language teaching. Current research technology is operative only when

the problem elements can be meaningfully and relevantly defined operationally, through the use of some measurement or observation technique. When this is currently done for vague, diffuse but intuitively meaningful notions such as "bilingualism", "intellectual functioning", "cognitive flexibility", "language skills", and so on, the resultant operational transformation yields tests, questionnaires, experimental tasks that are supposed to be related in significant ways to the underlying intuitive notions, but they are not. This crucial transformation procedure suffers from reductionism, and contemporary psychological research has not been able to routinely solve this problem. Furthermore, there are no indications, at present, that this problem is going to be solved in the near future. Thus, while basic academic research will continue to flourish and search for relationships in human behavior in reductionist terms, it is not likely to be of crucial service to the applied needs of society.

(C) What is the best method of teaching a second language?: here, the amount of empirical data that research has generated is even more formidable than in the previous two areas, but we are nowhere near an adequate solution to the problem. The student who must review this literature actually becomes more confused rather than more knowledgeable. Comparisons across studies is a gratuitous task inasmuch as the conditions that are known to be of relevance are not the same and their variance contribution is unknown: the relationship between the investigator's theoretical description of a condition or method of instruction and the instructor's actual classroom activities is not controllable or even measurable to any significant extent; what the investigator can control in terms of exposure conditions, he losses because what really matters is what the student does with it, and that is something the investigator has no control over; what the investigator can measure does not represent what the student has learned, and vice versa; and so on.

I'd like to outline my conception of the new consciousness that is needed

to turn current technological innovations in FL education into a tool that is subservient to our educational aspirations. This new reality of freedom will cure the balt syndrome. Nothing new is needed. Not even money. Only individual initiative, a positive affirmation towards the path of liberation.

Applied Educational Research

A clear distinction is to be made between "basic research" and "applied research". Basic research is esoteric, specialized, and inaccessible to the teacher. To be a consumer of it, to be dependent upon it means to be subjugated to the authority and expertise of others. It means giving up the freedom of choice in favor of faith and trust in the technocrat who very often is far removed from the realities and needs of the classroom, and in any event, is not the person who is held "accountable". Basic research is a method of arriving at general theories about basic human behavior. It deals with laws and principles in the abstract; its observations are made under "controlled" conditions, which involves the creation of artificial, non-natural settings. When basic research is carried out in naturalistic settings, its artificiality is not thereby reduced. Only some of the relevant factors are investigated at any point and these are reduced to operational definitions by observation techniques that must meet certain restrictive standards (e.g., observability, objectivity, elementarism). The problems that are researched are dictated by these standards not by the real needs for greater practical know-how. Their claimed relevance to teaching problems turns out to be false.

Applied research refers to the systematic investigation of a particular social setting. It is a tool used for gaining additional knowledge about the total configuration of interacting factors in the setting. The setting and the problem are defined independently of the techniques available through applied research. They are given by personal judgment, folk theory, ordinary experience, intuitive understanding. The systematic techniques made available by applied

research are plugged in wherever possible or desirable. The overall integrity of the social setting, as given in the ordinary understanding of it, is never compromised, altered or reduced to the demands of "scientific" standards. In a sense, it is the scientific standards that are being compromised for the sake of maintaining the full meaning of the problem being investigated.

Personalizing Choice in the Educational System

Consider the procedure typically followed in the implementation of a new educational program. It is one that may be suitable for the construction of a chemical plant but is totally unrealistic for the school. A blueprint program imposed externally, from the top, is an act of violence upon the individuality of the teacher and the student. It destroys, alienates and cannot succeed. An educational program, in fact rather than delusion, is not a blueprint plan but a descriptive statement of ongoing activity. A program cannot realistically be planned and followed; it can only emerge after the fact, within the total configuration of a setting. A program cannot objectively be evaluated as to its overall "success"; evaluation can only consist of descriptive statements about isolated and separate aspects of the total educational setting. Many aspects that are intuitively meaningful cannot be directly and unambiguously assessed: the effects upon the teacher's morale and self-satisfaction, the long term effects upon student creativity and motivation, the quality of student-teacher interaction, the psychological climate in school, the support and involvement of the community. Just because these aspects cannot be scientifically and objectively described, assessed, or controlled is no justification for leaving them out of the overall picture and for making decisions without considering them in <u>equal</u> importance to those aspects that are measurable in more straightforward terms.

Applied research in education begins, not with a plan and its monitoring,

but also the teacher. A beginning might be an encounter group experience in which the teacher is given the opportunity of taking a non-critical, loving look at himself: Where is his head at? What are his hopes and aspirations as an individual in his multiple social roles? What is the range and nature of his everyday interactions with friends, family, colleagues, students? Can he describe his philosophical views, his social attitudes, his political beliefs? What is his conception of the educational process, of human communication, of the foundations of his field of specialized knowledge? Does he identify with his profession, does he read, does he know how to obtain information on novel technological developments? Does he feel like a cog in a machine or has he retained an impression of freedom of choice? Does he view himself as an agent of assimilation, an authority, an enemy of the students, or a friend?

Exploration of these broad, all encompassing and personal issues clears the way for more specific ones, those that are more directly related to the teacher's instructional activities in the classroom. He may find that he is dissatisfied with certain aspects of his teaching. He would like to explore with some new techniques but doesn't know where to start and what the consequences might be. He doesn't know how to get help, how to talk openly with his supervisor, how much freedom to allow to his students. He may realize his understanding of the fundamentals of his field are inadequate but how and to whom shall he make such an admission? He may have difficulty getting along with some young people in the class and needs opportunity to learn more effective interpersonal management techniques. And so on.

Finally, he may feel sufficiently involved and committed to do something concrete. He wants to be shown how he can use systematic observation techniques to monitor the process of change, how to prepare tests and questionnaires, how to change the participatory structure in his classroom, how to state behavioral objectives, how to use multiple evaluation criteria and how to interpret them

in the light of his own personal judgment which must always retain a primary status less alienation and inhumanity destroy his effectiveness and sense of well being. Out of these concrete activities, individually coherent and custom tailored to his personality, interests, self-confidence, emerges the program and the curriculum. There is no prodding from the school administrator, no externally imposed blueprint, no threat, no alienation, no loss of personal dignity. There is the recognition that the educational process is a complex configuration of fluid, changing, uncontrollable set of interacting factors. There is no personal responsibility for failure or success, no personal accountability, only that of the system as a whole.

Depersonalizing Responsibility for the Educational System

The recent new emphasis on accountability in education has both positive and negative potentials. If used by school administrators to pressure teachers for improved student scores on standardized norms, it becomes a pernicious act of violence and injustice against the personhood of the individual teacher. If used as part of an assessment procedure for the overall educational process in a particular school setting along with other observation techniques, it may have some value as an information feedback system. However, the very concept of "accountability" contains the notion of individual responsibility within a complex system that is beyond significant individual control and choice. It is likely, therefore, to be more abused as an instrument of arbitrary punishment and scape goating than used constructively as an assessment instrument.

The issue of responsibility in education raises some extremely difficult questions that the profession as a whole must carefully consider and deliberate. Witch hunting must at all cost be avoided. Posing the problem in terms such as "Who is responsible for current educational failures" and variously allocating parts of the blame to segments of the educational hierarchy is not going to be

useful, helpful or just. Instead the creative potential of teachers and school administrators, of students, of legislators and the larger community must be given a chance to unfold and flourish in an atmosphere that is free from the stifling restrictions of the philosophy of accountability. In the reality of the new consciousness, individual freedom alone can unleash man's creative energies, not coercion, not competition, not accountability, but faith, freedom, cooperation, permissiveness, trust, hope.

Freedom to teach is an essential component of the new educational process that is unfolding. It includes freedom from personal responsibility for students' percentile ranks on standardized, norm-referenced tests, freedom from administrative authority relating to decisions and policies governing the teacher's activities, freedom from the obligation of certification and specialized training. Freedom to learn is a necessary condition for the full development of the individual's creative potentials. It includes freedom from compulsory courses and curricula, freedom from authority, freedom from the requirement of tests, examinations, and grades.

The Greening of the FL Classroom

To the person whose reality is at the level of the older consciousness, my description of the educational process under freedom to teach and learn must evoke a feeling of horror or derision, or both in turn. Visions of anarchy, chaos abuse, waste, present themselves to his excited imagination. His reality of a technological society held in place by regimentation, bureaucratic order, certification, standardization, individual reward system, laws, regulations, guidelines, blueprints, etc., is threatened by the cataclysmic implications of an individual freedom that removes itself by one fell swoop of the sword of liberation. A world without systematic control and paternalistic rule is, for him,

the worst imaginable hell. Man, when he cannot transcend the reality of organization and technology, is fearful, restricted, restrictive, lacking hope and faith and trust. The only creative imagination that is left to him lies in the construction of visions of doom unless...His blind faith in organizational structure robs him of any remaining faith in the goodness and capacities of free man. His restricted vision limits him to incapacitating slogans, the futile call for more and better of the same. Under the spell of these tired, old, worn out, impotent notions he condones the current reality of mediocrity, injustice, inequality, intellectual poverty, dull regimentation, inhumanity and dehumanization.

To the new consciousness of freedom, it is the current reality that is intolerable, and it is the future that holds the unfulfilled promises of democracy, of technology, of creativity. He is the true believer in <u>free</u> enterprise, not the socially organized injustices of a competitive economic bureaucracy, but the free <u>enterprise</u> of personal freedom to pursue the fulfillment of inner potentials and dreams. The more freedom to teach and learn is introduced in our current mass educational system, the clearer the distinction will become between the needs of society for trained manpower to support technology and the needs of the individual to explore his creativity and fulfill his true individual self. The recognition of this distinction is likely to be the most immediate and important consequence of the new freedom. Even in an atmosphere of less than total freedom, there is room for both types of educational enterprises to flourish. Industry will continue to demand training, certification, degrees, the mastery of a known body of knowledge, but it will have to do its own schooling and recruiting. Universal, state supported education should not be allowed to be used exclusively for such a purpose. But, more importantly, as more individuals in our society become liberated, not just the young but those throughout the ranks of the establishment, we will see the emergence of creative and viable alternatives in individual life-styles, not only the kind that isolates and

removes the individual from the mainstream of society, but also a kind that recognizes the great potential of technology for human and humane use, but can live side by side with the machine, the organized system, mass production, and urbanization without becoming spiritually servile to these conditions. Industry, the Corporate State, and the technocrats will gradually come to respect the new freedom and their internal organization will be realigned in the service of the new consciousness. Their changing character will make room for, will be dependent upon people whose individuality and creativity will not be assassinated by the educational production mill. Economic opportunity need no longer depend on the successful adoption of the personality of 'organization man' and the school achiever. The educational spectrum will thus be allowed to diversify, to de-standardize, to individualize. Compared to the arid uniformity of our current schools, the classrooms of freedom will reflect the gorgeous colors of Spring and Autumn.

Freedom to teach will come to cure the balt syndrome.

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Footnotes

[1]This is an adapted version of the material contained in Chapter 1 in Jakobovits, 1972, in press.

[2]I am using "new consciousness" in the same sense as that used by Reich (1971) in his current bestseller on the revolutionary cultural events that are now transforming the reality of Americans.

[3]Whatever the theoretical difficulties associated with functional behaviorism, the applied research it has generated in special education and in clinical psychology is much to be admired.